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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted to study discussions of day care for children appearing in periodicals during 1959-81. Surveyed were articles found in the 12 most widely circulated magazines typically identified as being for women. A bibliography was made of the 96 articles appearing in the magazines, as listed in the "Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature." The 93 articles available were then read and classified by major content themes. Graphs and descriptive statistics were used to organize the data. Results indicated that the number of articles on child care topics published per year has tended to increase over time. Typical themes were found to fall generally into six categories relating to child care: finding and choosing a program, effects of centers on children, need for day care, specific program examples, starting a center, and parent-centered issues. It was additionally found that peak years of publication paralleled the political history of child care, although articles did not discuss political events but tended to view day care as a normal advance in society that frees women to pursue personal goals and society's needs. Day care was presented as a positive option for children. (Of the 96 articles identified, 40 appeared in "Parents Magazine.") (RH)

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Educating the American Public: A Survey of Child Care Articles in Popular Women's Magazines, 1959 to 1981

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According to Newsweek (1982) 45% of today's mothers with preschool children are working away from home, a number which has gone up fourfold from the late 1950s to the present time. As a result, 7.5 million young children need child care services. Currently, day care centers and away-from-home sitters serve over 62% of the nation's children, whereas 25 years ago 43% were being served. Such changes in employment figures along with current changes in family structure have made provision of quality child care a real concern.

Controversies surrounding child care programs at the federal and state levels have emerged along with increased concerns among child care professionals. As reflected by the National Association for the Education of Young Children's annual conference theme and the number of professional materials being published, one major question among the issues is how the American public can be educated about child care.

One way the public is educated is through the media. According to Neugebauer (1982, p. 6), day care has become a "hot news item" being discussed in 30 articles in national publications in the past 30 months. Yet, he contends that, "The media still finds day care to be a difficult field to cover " (p. 9). By looking at the coverage given day care in the past, groundwork for developing materials for the future publications is being explored.

The purpose of the present study was to survey child care material appearing in widely available women's magazines for the period 1959 to 1981. Specific

questions addressed in the study were: (a) Has the number of articles increased during the period from 1959 to 1981? (b) What have been the typical themes of the articles? (c) How has the information in the popular magazines related to the history of day care and professional developments in the area of child care?

The researchers believed the number of articles would increase to reflect changes in the number of working mothers and child care services. It was anticipated that the articles would offer practical information for selecting child care--concentrating on children's needs and easing parental apprehensions. The researchers were curious to see if the articles would reflect various historical views toward child care services.

The history of day care reflects the tripartite concerns of women, educators, and the government--liberation, child development, and welfare reform, respectively. As greater numbers of women find employment outside the home, as the body of knowledge concerning the needs of young children increases, and as governmental policies change to reflect public cry for economic improvement, child care attitudes are affected. According to Steinfels (1973), three attitudes toward the relationships between day care and societal movements are--day care as patchwork, as realization, and as utopia. Patchwork refers to the use of day care for compensating the faults in family structure and economic problems; it was intended to bring the disadvantaged to middle class status as reflected in Nixon's Family Assistance Plan. The realization view supports day care as a normal advance in society, freeing women to pursue personal goals and society's needs. The utopian view would "block the present direction of society and start it off on a new one " (p.15).

The study surveyed the articles found in the twelve most widely circulated magazines typically identified as women's magazines. The magazines indexed in

the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature were selected since it indexes the most widely read magazines available on the newsstand and in most public libraries. The magazines selected were Essence, Glamour, Good Housekeeping, Harper's Bazaar, Ladies Home Journal, Ms., Mademoiselle, McCall's, Parents, Redbook, Vogue, and Working Woman. The magazines vary in circulation from 400,000 for Working Woman which began in 1976 to over 7½ million for McCall's which began in 1870. While the magazines have the common feature of being for women, they vary in focus and readership from the young woman, to the home maker, to glamour type magazines, to those with a more feminist perspective.

Using the Reader's Guide, a bibliography was made of the 96 articles appearing in the 12 magazines. The articles selected were located under the Guide's descriptors dealing with child care--day care, child care, child services, and nurseries. The 93 available articles were then read and classified by major content themes. Graphs and descriptive statistics were used to organize the data. Table 1 lists the distribution of articles by magazine and by year.

Number of articles

Analysis of the results indicated that the number of articles published from 1959 to 1981 has tended to increase, but has been sporadic in number (see Table 2). The least number of articles published was one per year in 1960, 1962, 1964, and 1965. Two articles per year appeared in 1959, 1973, and 1974. Peak years were 1966, 1971, 1978, and 1981 with eight, ten, nine, and nine articles, respectively.

Typical themes

Typical themes of the 93 articles analyzed fell in six categories (see Table 3). Twenty-three discussed guidelines for selecting or finding day care services. Twelve articles discussed what centers do for children; that quality day care does not seem to inhibit intellectual, social, or emotional development was discussed. Eighteen articles on the need for day care emphasized the growing numbers of working women, both single and married, lower income and middle to upper income groups, as the basis for needing more child care facilities. The eighteen articles viewed day care positively, encouraging citizens to push for funding by congressmen or public agencies and encouraging individuals to think about beginning centers. Nineteen articles described specific programs in various cities and commercial day care companies. Thirteen articles focused on how to start a center, and eight focused on the parents' needs, including guilt mothers often feel and single parent housing that has day care included.

Relation to historical development

The peak years of publication do parallel the political history of child care. The peak about 1966 reflects the emergence of the Head Start program. The 1971 peak shadowed Nixon's Family Assistance Plan, the Child Care Services Act, and the Mondale-Brademas proposed Comprehensive Child Development Act, as well as the Child Care Act of 1979. The 1978-79 peak paralleled the proposed Child Care Act of 1979, the White House Conference of Families, and the International Year of the Child. Although the publication of articles seemed to parallel the political occurences related to child care, the articles read did not discuss the political happenings. The articles tended to support the realization view of day care. They stressed that more women are working,

with middle-class women working because families need the income and upper-class women working out of choice. None of the articles read discussed the patchwork or utopian view. This finding may have been expected since the magazines are directed at a middle-class readership.

Over the 20 year period of the present study, day care was presented as a positive option for children. In his study of the past 30 months however, Neugebauer (1982) concluded that there was a "less than enthusiastic endorsement of day care centers " (p.8). It should be noted that Neugebauer's study does not identify all sources of articles reviewed, but it appeared that many of his sources were business oriented.

Of the 96 articles identified in the present study 40 articles appeared in Parents Magazine. This emphasizes the opportunity for more articles to be published in other journals. In view of the large numbers of women working who have children under six there would appear to be an audience for more day care related articles in widely circulated magazines. Data suggest that more attention needs to be given to parent-centered issues and the effects that center care has on children and their families.

Neugebauer, R. Day care in the news. Child Care Information Exchange, September/October, 1982, 6-10.

Steinfels, M. O. Who's minding the children? New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973.

Working mothers, changing lives. Newsweek, August 9, 1982, 19.

Table 1

DISTRIBUTION OF DAY CARE ARTICLES
BY MAGAZINE AND YEAR

1959	(9,2)*						
1960	(3,1)						
1961	(3,1)	(9,1)	(10,1)				
1962	(9,1)						
1963	(5,1)	(9,1)	(10,1)				
1964	(9,1)						
1965	(9,1)						
1966	(5,6)	(9,2)					
1967	(3,1)	(9,3)	(10,2)				
1968	(8,1)	(9,1)	(11,1)				
1969	(9,2)	(10,1)					
1970	(3,1)	(8,1)	(9,3)	(10,1)			
1971	(3,1)	(5,2)	(8,3)	(9,3)	(10,1)		
1972	(7,1)	(8,1)	(9,2)	(10,1)			
1973	(8,1)	(9,1)					
1974	(6,2)						
1975	(6,2)	(9,2)					
1976	(4,1)	(9,1)	(10,1)				
1977	(8,1)	(9,3)	(10,1)				
1978	(2,1)	(3,1)	(4,1)	(6,1)	(9,3)	(10,1)	(12,1)
1979	(3,1)	(9,2)	(12,3)				
1980	(9,3)						
1981	(1,1)	(2,1)	(5,1)	(6,1)	(8,2)	(9,2)	(12,1)

*(first number is magazine, second is number of articles)

1 Essence
2 Glamour
3 Good Housekeeping
4 Harper's Bazaar
5 Ladies Home Journal
6 Ms.
7 Mademoiselle
8 McCall's
9 Parents
10 Redbook
11 Vogue
12 Working Woman

Table 2

NUMBER OF DAY CARE ARTICLES BY YEAR
FOR 12 SELECTED WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

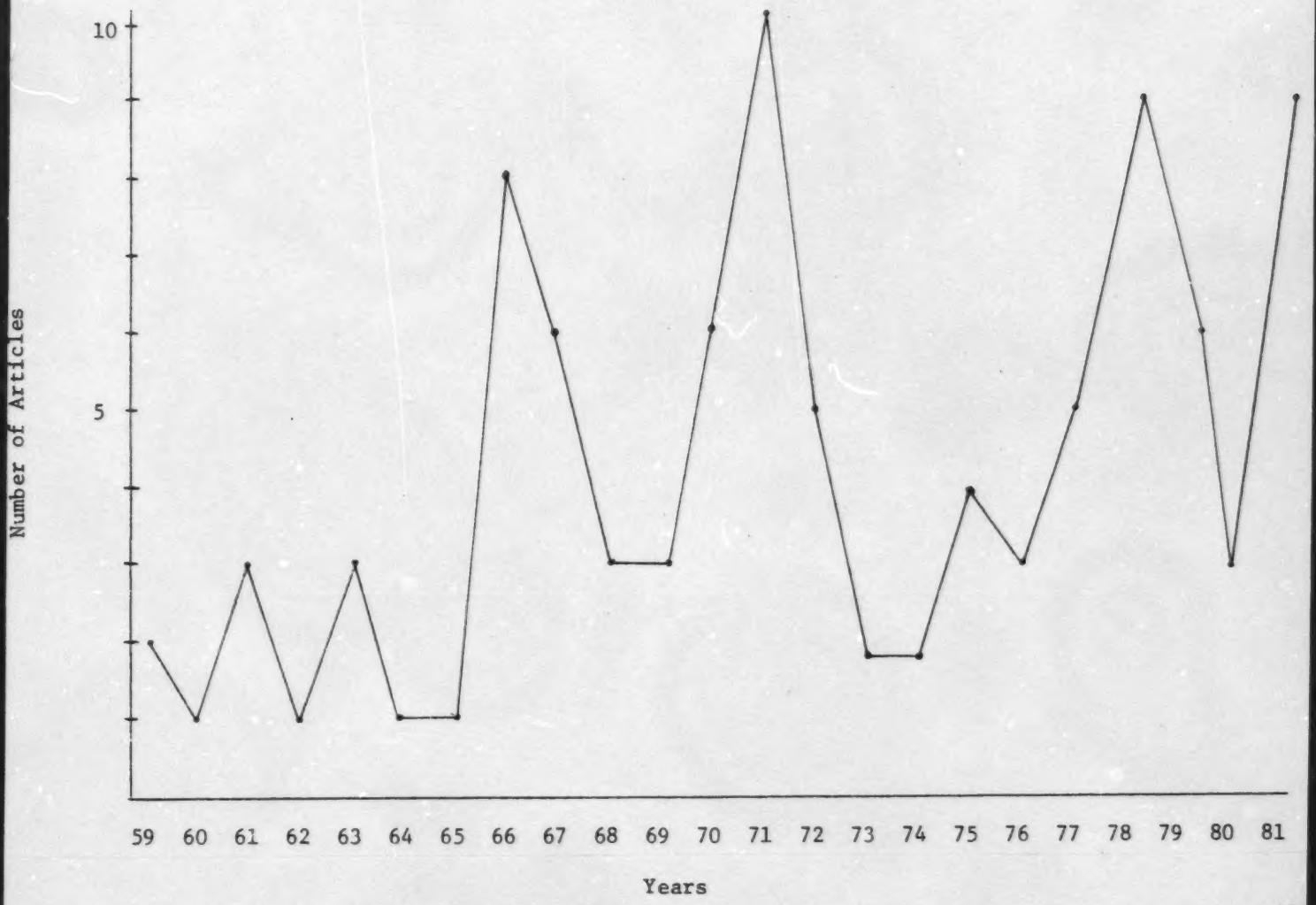

Table 3

TOPICS OF THE DAY CARE ARTICLES

FINDING AND CHOOSING A PROGRAM	23
EFFECTS OF CENTERS ON CHILDREN	12
NEED FOR DAY CARE	18
SPECIFIC PROGRAM EXAMPLES	19
STARTING A CENTER	13
PARENT-CENTERED ISSUES	8
TOTAL	93